

Claims

1. A dock leveler for a loading dock, comprising:

a deck adapted to be coupled to the loading dock such that the deck is movable relative thereto; wherein the deck comprises a right upper plate, a left upper plate, and a plurality of lower support beams; wherein the right upper plate and the left upper plate are affixed to the lower support beams; the deck has a front edge, a rear edge, and two lateral edges; the deck has a deck width that extends between the two lateral edges; the deck has a deck length that extends from the front edge to the rear edge; the deck has a joint between the right upper plate and the left upper plate; the joint extends longitudinally from the front edge to the rear edge of the deck; and the right upper plate and the left upper plate are substantially stationary relative to each other; and

a lip extension plate coupled to the front edge and being movable relative thereto.

2. The dock leveler of claim 1, wherein the joint includes a connecting bar disposed below the right upper plate and the left upper plate.

3. The dock leveler of claim 2, wherein the connecting bar has a bar length, a bar width, and a bar thickness all of which are perpendicular to each other, wherein the bar length runs along the joint, the bar thickness extends from the right upper plate to the left upper plate, and the bar width is greater than the bar thickness.

4. The dock leveler of claim 3, wherein the right upper plate and the left upper plate provide an upper driving surface, wherein the connecting bar is disposed no higher than the upper driving surface.

5. The dock leveler of claim 1, wherein the right upper plate and the left upper plate provide an upper driving surface, and the joint includes a plurality of spaced-apart weld beads that are disposed below the upper driving surface.

6. The dock leveler of claim 1, wherein the joint provides a gap between the right upper plate and the left upper plate.

7. The dock leveler of claim 6, wherein the gap has a variable gap width that is visible.

8. The dock leveler of claim 1, wherein a first frictional pattern exists on top of the right upper plate and second frictional pattern exists on top of the left upper plate, wherein the first frictional pattern is shifted out of registry with the second frictional pattern.

9. The dock leveler of claim 1, wherein the joint is substantially parallel to the plurality of lower support beams.

10. The dock leveler of claim 1, wherein the joint is substantially centrally located between the two lateral edges of the deck.

11. A dock leveler for a loading dock, comprising:

a deck adapted to be coupled to the loading dock such that the deck is movable relative thereto; wherein the deck comprises a right upper plate, a left upper plate, and a plurality of lower support beams; the right upper plate and the left upper plate are affixed to the lower support beams; the deck has a front edge, a rear edge, and two lateral edges; the deck has a deck width that extends between the two lateral edges; the deck has a deck length that extends from the front edge to the rear edge; a joint exists between the right upper plate and the left upper plate; the joint extends longitudinally from the front edge to the rear edge of the deck; the joint is substantially parallel to the plurality of lower support beams; and the right upper plate and the left upper plate are substantially stationary relative to each other;

a first frictional pattern disposed on the right upper plate; and

a second frictional pattern disposed on the left upper plate, wherein the first frictional pattern is shifted out of registry with the second frictional pattern.

12. The dock leveler of claim 11, wherein the joint includes a connecting bar disposed below the right upper plate and the left upper plate.

13. The dock leveler of claim 12, wherein the connecting bar has a bar length, a bar width, and a bar thickness all of which are perpendicular to each other, wherein the bar length runs along the joint, the bar thickness extends from the right upper plate to the left upper plate, and the bar width is greater than the bar thickness.

14. The dock leveler of claim 13, wherein the right upper plate and the left upper plate provide an upper driving surface, wherein the connecting bar is disposed no higher than the upper driving surface.

15. The dock leveler of claim 11, wherein the right upper plate and the left upper plate provide an upper driving surface, and the joint includes a plurality of spaced-apart weld beads that are disposed below the upper driving surface.

16. The dock leveler of claim 11, wherein the joint provides a gap between the right upper plate and the left upper plate.

17. The dock leveler of claim 16, wherein the gap has a variable gap width that is visible.

18. The dock leveler of claim 11, wherein the joint is substantially centrally located between the two lateral edges of the deck.

19. A method of making a deck for a dock leveler, wherein the deck has length extending from a front edge to a rear edge, and the deck has a width extending between two lateral edges of the deck, the method comprising:

connecting a right plate to a left plate by welding a joint therebetween, wherein the joint runs longitudinally from the front edge to the rear edge, wherein the right plate and the left plate are substantially coplanar and the joint is disposed between the two lateral edges of the deck;

fastening a plurality of support beams to the right plate and the left plate, wherein the plurality of support beams extend from the front edge to the rear edge of the deck;

providing a lip hinge at the front edge of the deck; and

connecting a lip extension plate to the lip hinge so that the lip extension plate can pivot relative to the right plate and the left plate.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein the step of connecting the right plate to the left plate involves welding a connecting bar to the right plate and the left plate, wherein the connecting bar runs longitudinally along the joint.

21. The method of claim 20, wherein the connecting bar has a bar width and a bar thickness, the bar width is greater than the bar thickness, and the bar width extends substantially perpendicular to the right plate and the left plate.

22. The method of claim 19, wherein the joint includes a plurality of spaced-apart weld beads.

23. The step of claim 19, further comprising creating a gap at the joint between the right plate and the left plate.

24. The step of claim 19, further comprising creating a variable width gap whose variable width is visible.

25. The step of claim 19, further comprising positioning the joint substantially midway between the two lateral edges of the deck.